

Testimony  
Sharon M. Palmer  
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Education Committee

Good morning Sen. Slossberg, Rep. Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I am Sharon Palmer former member of the CTHS Board and retired Commissioner of Labor. I am here today to speak in favor of SB 383 AAC The Technical High School System.

Let me state for the record that I am a huge fan and supporter of the technical high schools. It is important to remind everyone that the system was on the brink of extinction in 2011-12. A January 2012 task force report explored transferring responsibility for the schools from the State Dept. Of Education to local entities. That concept was rejected and the report recommended centralization for better coordination and reduction of duplication. It also called for completion of a strategic planning initiative. The report confirmed what many of us believe: namely that the CTHSS is an important resource for CT's prosperity and produces graduates capable of filling a substantial need for high skills jobs.

So the question is.. Where are we now after 5 short years and where are we going?

I believe the CTHSS is at a crossroads. An excellent comprehensive strategic plan is in place and much progress has been made. There is still much work to reach the potential of a world class system particularly given the budget constraints we are facing.

SB 383 is an important addition on the continuing road to excellence. It would designate the Superintendent as the administrative head for a budget agency separate from SDE. The operational budget including staffing needs approved by the CTHS Board would be submitted to OPM while continuing to fulfill the reporting requirements to OFA, the Legislature and other agencies.

We must take immediate action. We do not need another task force or report. The Supt. In collaboration with the CTHS Board must have the hiring and fiscal flexibility and autonomy to pivot, respond, and adjust in this time of highly critical demand.

There are currently over 70 vacancies in the system including 30 teachers and trade instructors urgently needed to produce quality graduates. The current hiring process is long and cumbersome taking many months. Hiring and fiscal autonomy is needed to meet prioritized needs.

Our Congressional delegation has diligently worked to secure funding for new defense work which will require at least 1500 new skilled welders, carpenters, machinists and other allied trades professionals. There will be a huge demand on CTHSS by Electric Boat/General Dynamics, United Aircraft and others. We must maximize this opportunity to achieve the economic and job creation opportunities for Connecticut.

It goes without saying that the potential for economic development and job creation is huge. If we do not adequately fund CTHSS we may not be able to fulfill our agreements and commitments to Connecticut's defense contractors and the approximately 50 related employers in the region. We should not be put in the position of ending good job producing programs or possibly closing schools which produce graduates entering good paying high skills jobs.

SB 383 will go a long way to help CTHSS to continue its strategic plan toward continued excellence benefitting all of us. I urge you to support this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.